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BACKGROUNDER 5-6143
JOHN GUERRINI/UNITED NATIONS

SEPTEMBER 16, 1978

ISSUES AT THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ANNCR: THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY OPENS TUESDAY (SEPT 19) IN NEW YORK (FYI: THREE PM). VOA'S JOHN GUERRINI HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS ON THE ISSUES THAT ARE LIKELY TO DOMINATE THE THREE-MONTH SESSION.

VOICE: WHILE DELEGATES DEBATE ALMOST EVERY PROBLEM CONFRONTING HUMANITY, ONE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OVERSHADOWS THE ENTIRE PROCEEDING: IS ANYBODY LISTENING?

THE QUESTION ISN'T JUST BEING WHISPERED IN THE CORRIDORS-- SECRETARY-GENERAL KURT WALDHEIM HIMSELF HAS BEGUN ASKING IT OUT LOUD.

AS THE U-N AGENDA MUSHROOMS AND SPECIAL CONFERENCES MULTIPLY, MISTER WALDHEIM WARNS THAT THE WORLD IS PAYING LESS AND LESS ATTENTION. IN AN OUTSPOKEN PASSAGE IN HIS RECENT ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, MISTER WALDHEIM SAID HE'S WORRIED THAT THE U-N MAY BE NUMBING PUBLIC INTEREST IN VITAL SUBJECTS AND SUBSTITUTING RHETORICAL EXCHANGES FOR ACTION.

WHAT'S WRONG, ACCORDING TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, IS THAT THE U-N IS REACTING TO JET-AGE PROBLEMS WITH DIPLOMATIC PROCEDURES FROM THE HORSE AND BUGGY DAYS: CONFERENCES, PREDICTABLE SPEECHES, IMPRACTICAL RESOLUTIONS. HE CALLED FOR AN URGENT REVIEW OF THE WAY THE ORGANIZATION GOES ABOUT ITS BUSINESS-- AND FOR A START, HE PROPOSED THAT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY SHOULD THINK ABOUT CONDENSING ITS AGENDA.

BUT THERE'S NO SIGN THAT'S LIKELY TO HAPPEN. THE AGENDA IS PACKED WITH MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED THIRTY ITEMS THIS YEAR. AMONG THOSE CONSIDERED LIKELY TO GENERATE THE MOST HEAT

ARE SURELY THOSE DEALING WITH THE MIDDLE EAST. REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME OF THE AMERICAN-EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI SUMMIT AT CAMP DAVID, DELEGATES HERE ARE BRACING FOR A STORMY DEBATE. THE RECENT NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE IN BELGRADE LAID OUT A STRONGLY ANTI-ISRAEL PROGRAM, CALLING FOR SANCTIONS AGAINST ISRAEL AND FOR BARRING IT FROM THE U-N.

SOUTHERN AFRICA IS ALSO SURE TO COME IN FOR A LOT OF ATTENTION. THE RISING TIDE OF VIOLENCE IN RHODESIA APPEARS TO BE OVERWHELMING THE CHANCES FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT--WHILE IN NAMIBIA A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT BASED ON THE PARTICIPATION OF THE U-N FINALLY SEEMS TO BE WITHIN GRASP. MEANWHILE, SOUTH AFRICA, WHICH HAS TAKEN CARE TO SHOW A COOPERATIVE POSTURE ON NAMIBIA, CAN EXPECT NO LET-UP IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ATTACKS ON ITS INTERNAL RACIAL POLICY OF APARTHEID. ONCE AGAIN THIS YEAR, THE SOUTH AFRICAN DELEGATION IS N O T EXPECTED TO TAKE ITS SEAT.

ANOTHER MAJOR AREA OF CONTROVERSY IS THE ECONOMIC NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN INDUSTRIAL AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES--OR THE "NORTH-SOUTH DIALOGUE," AS IT'S COMMONLY CALLED. THE TALKS ARE IN STALEMATE AND THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES PLAN TO TAKE THE ISSUE STRAIGHT TO THE PLENARY, INSTEAD OF DISCUSSING IT IN COMMITTEE, TO FOCUS MORE ATTENTION ON IT.

(OPT) THE ASSEMBLY WILL ALSO BE TAKING UP AT LEAST FIFTEEN ITEMS ON DISARMAMENT, SEVERAL ON HUMAN RIGHTS--AND A GOOD NUMBER ON THE FINANCING OF VARIOUS U-N OPERATIONS. (END OPT)

IN ITS NUMEROUS RESOLUTIONS, THE ASSEMBLY WILL CONDEMN, DECLARE AND AFFIRM. BUT ESPECIALLY SINCE THESE RESOLUTIONS ARE NOT BINDING ON GOVERNMENTS, THE DELEGATES WILL HAVE TO BE MINDFUL OF SECRETARY-WALDHEIM'S WARNING ABOUT THE NEED TO KEEP THE EAR AND THE SUPPORT OF THE PUBLIC. (SIGNED)